

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
June 19, 2025

Via Video Conference

Welcome, and Roll Call: Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. Eastern time.

Board Members in Attendance: Chuck Berry, Renee Beutell, Jan Hupp, Ryan Tyce, Jane Neubauer, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich, Mike Jones, Charles Fowler, Derek Ahl, and Gary Thomas

Board Members Not in Attendance: JoLynn Stroda

USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster

Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

Guest in Attendance: Barry Campbell

Agenda

Marsha Gray requested the addition of item B, CDARS Investments, under the Finance Committee. It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Jane Neubauer to approve the agenda as revised. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Meeting Minutes

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to approve the May 15, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report – Chuck Berry reported.

- a. **Board Nominations Update** – Berry shared the nominees: Central Region, John Krueger and Scott Powell; Eastern Region, A. Bentley Curry, Gerrit Strathmeyer, Kurt Emmerich, and Samuel Cartner; Western Region, Christian Aldrich, Mark Schmidlin, Mike Jones, and Sophia Stajduhar. The Ballots for the Eastern and Central regions were mailed on Saturday, June 14th, and the Western region were sent on Monday, June 16th. All votes are due on July 15th.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee – Mike Jones presented.

- a. **May 2025 Financials** – Jones provided a detailed overview of the May 2025 financials. Marsha Gray shared that she would provide a year-end estimate for the Board to review.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to accept the May 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **CDARS Investment** – Jones shared that the current CDARS investment is scheduled to mature on July 17, 2025.

It was **MOVED** by Mike Jones and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to authorize the Finance Committee/Executive Committee to make the CDARS investment decision based on maturity on July 17, 2025. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **RFP Announcement and Recommendation Process** – The RFP was announced, and proposals are

due on or before July 3, 2025. The Research Committee will assemble their selections and present their recommendations at the in-person Board meeting in July.

Industry Relations Committee – Chris Aldrich reported.

- a. **Handouts and New Sticker Design** – Marsha Gray provided a visual via Zoom of the new handout and sticker.
- b. **Planning for Michigan Meeting** – Aldrich will assemble a sign-up sheet for Board members to volunteer at the RCTB booth.

Governance Committee – Charles Fowler presented.

- a. **Publishing of Proposed Rule** – Fowler shared that the Order was published in the Federal Register on Friday, June 13th, and a 30-day comment period will be in effect, ending on July 14th. Fowler encouraged Board members and other growers to submit a comment. Marsha Gray will email the direct link to the Board.

Compliance Committee – Marsha Gray reported in Derek Ahl's absence.

- a. **Update** – Gray shared that the auditor, Jim Lantz, has conducted all three remaining audits. Two of the three are completed, and the third audit is pending final paperwork and is expected to be completed relatively quickly.
- Jamie Hanselman continues to work through non-reporting growers.

Promotion Committee – Jane Neubauer reported.

- **2025 Campaign Proposal** – Neubauer shared that the planning meeting with FleishmanHillard was recorded and shared with the Board via email. The Promotion Committee met to review the details of the presentation. Neubauer shared a detailed breakdown of the proposal from FleishmanHillard.
- Neubauer reminded the board of the \$850,000 budget for the Promotion Committee. The committee is recommending accepting FleishmanHillard's proposal for \$812,000, Firefall (web hosting, web design, and retail locator support) for \$16,000, and possible sponsorship with Trees for Troops for \$10,000, leaving \$12,000 unaccounted for.
- Question was asked if the Promotion Committee could obtain information from FleishmanHillard regarding the advertisements on Instagram and the data around “not interested” clicks. Neubauer will reach out to FleishmanHillard to request that data.

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve the \$812,000 contract with FleishmanHillard to execute the 2025 marketing plan as presented and authorize the Promotion Committee Chair to amend the FleishmanHillard contract for additional services not to exceed the total Promotion budget. **MOTION APPROVED.**

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to approve a contract with Firefall LLC., for web hosting, web design, and website maintenance, not to exceed \$16,000, including the Retail Locator. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- Neubauer thanked Derek Ahl for volunteering his social media contact at Northern Family Farms to help put together several social media posts for the Board.

Management Staff Update – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** - As of June 19, 2025, the RCTB has received 1,057 payers through the lockbox and online portal for \$1,191,506.09, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs for \$221,415.91, totaling \$1,412,926.00
- b. **Proposed Rule Update – Comment Period** – Gray shared that much of the information was covered

under the Governance section of the meeting. She encouraged Board members to also reach out to local growers to post their comments on the Order changes.

- c. **MI Meeting Updates and Schedule** – Gray shared that the Board should arrive on Wednesday, July 23rd, in time for dinner. The Board meeting will take place on Thursday, July 24th. The NCTA Board meeting will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. With Board members on both Boards, the RCTB will delay the start of their meeting to 11:00 a.m.
On Thursday evening, there will be a hosted cocktail reception. Following this event, the RCTB, NCTA, and Christmas Spirit Foundation will gather for a buffet dinner together.

New Business: no new items.

USDA – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status - Non-responding Importer** – Webster met with the Office of General Counsel staff and the lawyer working on the case. Webster walked through goals and different ideas. Due to the non-responder being in another country, it brings a different level of complexity. Webster will provide the Board with all updates.
- b. **Leadership Updates** – At the end of May, Bruce Summers retired from USDA. Administrator Erin Morris is the new Administrator, and Melissa Bailey is the new Associate Administrator. Within AMS, the Specialty Crop Programs are led by Ken Petersen, Acting Deputy Administrator, and Heather Pichelman, Associate Deputy Administrator.

For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:

- Charles Fowler shared that Jan Hupp's Virtual Farm Tour was excellent.
- Derek Ahl apologized for joining the meeting late.
- Marsha Gray thanked the Board for remembering her after her injury.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Summer In-Person Meeting** - July 24, 2025 – Dutchman Tree Farms, Manton, Michigan, in conjunction with the National Christmas Tree Association meeting.
- b. **Future Meeting Schedule** - The RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 21, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.

Adjourn:

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:05 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Tomaszkeski, Staff, for Jolynn Stroda, Secretary